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Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 ORM-02 DHA-02 SCA-01 AID-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /091 W
---------- 074090
R 091216Z JUL 76
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 601
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19619

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SREF, SHUM, CB, TH
SUBJ: HUMAN RIGHTS/REFUGEES: POSSIBLE UN SPONSORSHIP FOR
REPATRIATION OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES IN THAILAND

REF: (A) STATE 163610 (B) BANGKOK 19373 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: RTG OFFICIALS STRESS PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY THAT
THAI GOVERNMENT
WILL NOT FORCE REFUGEES TO RETURN TO CAMBODIA
AGAINST THEIR WILL. BOTH EMBASSY AND UNHCR BELIEVE THESE VIEWS
REFLECT ACCURATELY PRESENT SITUATION, DESPITE GENUINE THAI DESIRE
TO BE RID OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM. END SUHMARY.

1. IN SPITE OF THE RHETORII IN SOME THAI PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS,
NEITHER THE EMBASSY NOR UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE IN BANGKOK FORSEE
THE RTG MAKING A "DEAL" WITH THE CAMBODIANS TO REPATRIATE REFUGEES
INVOLUNTARILY. FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAI RATTAKUN ATTEMPTED TO ALLAY
ANY FEARS ON THIS POINT WHEN HE TOLD MEMBERS OF THE FOREIGN
CORRESPONDENTS CLUB JULY 3 CATEGORICALLY THAT THAILAND WOULD NOT
FORCIBLY REPATRIATE ANY CAMBODIAN, LAO, OR VIETNAMESE REFUGEES.
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ON JULY 7, MFA DIRGEN OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION DEPARTMENT PHIRAPHONG KASEMSI, ALSO RTG'S SEATO COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE, TOLD THE SEATO COUNCIL THAT PHICHAI INFORMED IENG SARY THAT THAILAND WAS OBLIGED TO ABIDE BY ITS AGREEMENT WITH UNHCR THAT REFUGEES COULD BE REPATRIATED AGAINST THEIR WILL, AS WELL.

2. PRIVATELY, BOTH WE AND UNHCR HAPE RECEIVED SIMILAR ASSURANCES FROM A NUMBER OF RTG OFFICIALS I VOLVED IN THE MATTER, WHO STATE THAT NOT ONLY MUST ANY REPATRIATIONS BE VOLUNTARY BUT THERE MUST ALSO BE A WAY OF ASSURING THAT THE REFUGEES ARE SAFE SNCE THEY ARE INSIDE CAMBODIA. NO ONE HIDES THE FACT THAT RTG WOULD LIKE TO SEE ALL REFUGEES LEAVE BUT IS REALISTIC ABOUT THE CAMBODIAN SITUATION AS IT IS AT PRESENT.

3. NUMBER OF ACCOUNTS WE HAVE HEARD OF THE PHICHAI-IENG

MEETING IN SISOPHON JUNE 16-17 SEEM TO ATTEST TO BOTH THAI AND CAMBODIAN CAUTIOUSNESS ON THE REFUGEE QUESTION. IENG SARY REPORTEDLY NOTED THAT CAMBODIANS DESIRING TO RETURN HOME WERE DOING SO SUCCESSFULLY THROUGH PARIS AND PEKING, AND THERE WAS NO REASON WHY THIS COULD NOT CONTINUE. HE SAID THAT ARRANGEMENTS COULD BE MADE FOR THOSE IN THAILAND TO RETURN, AS WELL, OFFERING GUARANTEES FOR THEIR SAFETY, ACCORDING TO INTERIOR DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY DAMRONG SUNTHORNSAATHU". NOT ONLY DID

THE THAI STATE THAT THEY COULD NOT FORCE THE CAMBODIANS TO GO BACK, BUT THEY PROVIDED THE CAMBODIAN SIDE OF THE TEXT OF (PRESUMABLY) UNHCR'S POLICY ON INVOLUNTARY REPATRIATION, A UNHCR OFFICIAL TOLD US.

4. THE RTG UNDOUBTEDLY PROPOSED UNHCR INVOLVEMENT SO THE LATTER COULD ARRANGE FOR ANY RETURNS AND ASSURE THAT NOTHING WOULD HAPPEN TO THE RETURNEES, PLACING RESPONSIBILITY ON UNHCR SHOULDERS FOR ANYTHING THAT WENT WRONG. PHIRAPHONG TOLD THE SEATO COUNCIL THAT THE CAMBODIANS SAID THEY WOULD CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF UNHCR PARTICIPATION, ALTHOUGH IENG SARY DID NOT APPEAR OVERJOYED AT THE PROSPECT, ACCORDING TO OBSERVERS. UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE BERTA SAID THE RTG HAS BEEN ALMOST EAGER IN ITS EFFORTS TO PERSUADE HIM TO AGREE TO SUCH A ROLE AND TO TRAVEL TO THE BORDER TO MEET WITH THE CAMBODIANS. HE HAS BEEN TRYING TO CONFIDENTIAL

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PERSUADE THE THAI THAT HE CAN DO NOTHING WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS FROM GENEVA, WHICH HE HAS NOT RECEIVED.

5. PRIVATELY, BERTA DOES NOT SEE THE HIGH COMMISSIONER AGREEING TO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE WITHOUT A REQUEST FROM CAMBODIA ITSELF. IN ADDITION, HE BELIEVES IT UNLIKELY THAT THAT COUNTRY, EVEN WERE IT TO MAKE SUCH A REQUEST (WHICH IS UNLIKELY), WOULD PERMIT THE UNHCR TO CARRY OUT THE KIND OF LONG-TERM INSPECTION THAT IT WOULD

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NORMALLY WISH TO MAKE, AN ASSESSMENT WITH WHICH EMBASSY AGREES.

6. IN VIEW OF THE FOREGOING, IT SEEMS TOO EARLY TO ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF SAFEGUARDS TO ASSURE THAT REPATRIATIONS ARE KNOWLEDGE-ABLY VOLUNTARY. HOWEVER, THE REFUGEES ARE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS AS TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION THEY WOULD FACE UPON THEIR RETURN NOW. IF ANYTHING, STORIES CIRCULATING INSIDE THE REFUGEE CAMPS ABOUT THE SITUATION ARE PROBABLY EVEN WORSE THAN THE REALITY OF IT. NEITHER THE UNHCR NOR WE FORESEE A WILLINGNESS AMONG THE VAST MAJORITY OF REFUGEES TO RETURN TO CAMBODIA AT THIS TIME.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEES, REPATRIATION, HUMAN RIGHTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BANGKO19619
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760265-1009
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760776/aaaacopm.tel
Line Count: 126
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 STATE 163610, 76 BANGKOK 19373
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <17 AUG 2004 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

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Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HUMAN RIGHTS/REFUGEES: POSSIBLE UN SPONSORSHIP FOR REPATRIATION OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES IN THAILAND
TAGS: PFOR, SREF, SHUM, CB, TH
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006